

# THE METHODS OF MORIS KLAW

By SAX ROHMER,  
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## THE HEADLESS MUMMIES

THE mysteries which my eccentric friend, Moris Klaw, was most successful in handling were those which had their origin either in the human brain or in the mysterious history of some relic of ancient times. You who have followed these records will have made the acquaintance of Coram, the curator of the Menzies Museum, and it was through Coram that I first came to hear of the inexplicable beheading of mummies which, commencing with that of Mr. Pettigrew's valuable mummy of the priestess Hor-an-ku, developed into a perfect epidemic. No more useless outrage could well be imagined than the decapitation of an ancient Egyptian corpse; and if I was surprised when I heard of the first case, my surprise became stark amazement when yet other mummies began mysteriously to lose their heads. But I will deal with the first instance, now, as it was brought under my notice by Coram.

He rang me up early one morning. "I say, Scaries," he said, "a very odd thing has happened. You've heard me speak of Pettigrew, the collector; he lives out Wandsworth way; he's one of our trustees. Well, some demented burglar broke into his house last night, took nothing, but cut off the head of a valuable mummy. The police are hopelessly mystified, and as I know you are keen on this class of copy I thought you might like to run down and have a chat with Pettigrew. Shall I tell him you are coming?"

"By all means," I said, and made an arrangement forthwith. Accordingly, about eleven o'clock I presented myself at a gloomy Georgian house standing well back from the high road, and screened by an unkempt shrubbery. Mr. Mark Pettigrew, a familiar figure at Sotheby's, was a little shriveled man, clean shaven and with the complexion of a dried apricot. His big spectacles seemed to occupy a great proportion of his face, but his eyes twinkled merrily and his humor was as dry as his appearance.

"Glad to see you, Mr. Scaries," he said. He conducted me to a large, gloomy room in which relics, principally Egyptian, were arranged and ticketed with museum-like precision. Before a wooden sarcophagus containing the swathed figure of a mummy he stopped, pointing. He looked as though he had come out of a sarcophagus himself.

"Hor-an-ku," he said—"a priestess of Sekhet; a very fine specimen, Mr. Scaries. I was present when it was found. See—here is her head!"

Stooping, he picked up the head of the mummy. Very cleanly and scientifically it had been unwrapped, severed from the trunk. It smelted strongly of bitumen and the shriveled features reminded me of nothing so much as of Mr. Mark Pettigrew.

"Did you ever hear of a more senseless thing?" he asked. "Come over and look at the window where he got in."

We crossed the dark apartment, and the collector drew my attention to a round hole which had been drilled in the glass of one of the French windows opening on a kind of miniature prairie which once had been a lawn. "I am having shutters fitted," he went on. "It is so easy to cut a hole in the glass and open the catch of these windows."

"Very easy," I agreed. "Was any one disturbed?"

"No one," he replied excitedly; "that's the insane part of the thing. The burglar, with all the night before him and with cases containing portable and really priceless objects about him, contented himself with decapitating the priestess. What on earth did he want her head for? Whatever he wanted it for, why the devil didn't he take it?"

We stared at one another blankly. That, then, is all that I have occasion to relate regarding the first of these mysterious outrages. I was quite unable to propound any theory covering the facts, to Pettigrew's evident annoyance. He assured me that I was very stupid and insisted upon opening a magnum of champagne. I then returned to my rooms, and since reflection upon the subject promised to be unprofitable, had dismissed it from my mind, when some time during the same evening Inspector Grimsby rang me up from the Yard.

"Hello, Mr. Scaries," he said; "I hear you called on Mr. Pettigrew this morning?"

I replied in the affirmative. "I wasn't on the case then, but I'm on it now."

"How's that?"

"Well, there's been another mummy beheaded in Sotheby's auction room."

"Where are you speaking from?" I asked.

"The auction rooms," I said. "I will meet you there in an hour. I said—and bring Moris Klaw if you can find him."

"Good," replied Grimsby with much satisfaction in his voice. "This case ought to be right in his line."

I chartered a taxi and proceeded without delay to the salubrious neighborhood of Wapping Old Stairs. At the head of the blind alley which harbors the Klaw empire I directed the man to wait. The gloom was very feebly dispelled by a wavering light in the shedlike front of the shop. A dilapidated person whose nose chronically blurred for the excesses of its owner hovered about a prospective purchaser. This was William whose exact position in the Klaw establishment I had never learned, but who apparently acted during his intervals of sobriety as a salesman.

"Good evening," I said. "Is Mr. Moris Klaw at home?"

"He is, sir," husked the derelict, "but he's very busy, sir, I believe, sir."

"Tell him Mr. Scaries has called."

He retired into the cavernous depths of the shop and I followed him as far as the dimly-lit counter.

"Moris Klaw, Moris Klaw! The devil's come for you!"

Thus the invisible parrot hailed my entrance. Scuffings and scratchings sounded continuously about me, punctuated with squeals. Then came the rumbling voice of Moris Klaw!

"Ah, Mr. Scaries—good evening, Mr. Scaries! Is it the Pettigrew mummy, is it not?"

He advanced through the shadows, his massive figure arrayed for traveling in the caped coat, his tulleless black undies as ever, his pince-nez glittering, his high, bald brow yellow as that of a Chinaman.

"There has been a second outrage," I said—"at Sotheby's. Inspector Grimsby has asked us to join him there."

Moris Klaw stooped, and from beneath the counter took out his flat-topped brown bowler. From its lining he extracted a cylindrical scent spray and mingled with the less pleasing perfumes that of verberna.

"A cooling Roman custom, Mr. Scaries," he rumbled, "so refreshing when one lives with rats. So it is Mr. Grimsby who is puzzled again. It is Mr. Grimsby who needs the poor old fool to hold the lantern for him, so that he, the clever Grimsby, can pick up the credit out of the darkness! And why not, Mr. Scaries, and why not? It is his business; it is my pleasure."

He raised his voice. "Isis! Isis!" Out into the light of the fluttering gas lamp, out from that nightmare abode, stepped Isis Klaw—looking more grotesque than a Paris fashion plate in an ironmonger's catalogue. She wore a costume of lettuce green silk, absolutely plain and unrelieved by any ornament, which rendered it the more remarkable. It was cut low at the neck, and at the point of the V, suspended upon a thin gold chain, hung a big emerald. Her darkly beautiful face was one to inspire a painter seeking a model for the Queen of Sheba, but an ultramodern note was struck by a huge hat of foaming black tulle. She greeted me with her wonderful smile.

"What, then," I said—"were you about to go out?"

"When I hear who it is," rumbled Moris Klaw, "I know that we are about to go out, and behold we are ready!"

He placed the quaint bowler on his head and passed through to the front of the shop.

"William," he admonished the ripe-nosed salesman, "there is here a smell of fourpenny ale. I will be your run, William. You will close at half past nine, and be sure you do not let the cat in the cupboard with the white mice. See that the goat does not get at the Dutch bulbs; they will kill him, that goat—those bulbs; he has for them a passion."

The three of us entered the waiting cab and within half an hour we arrived at the famous auction rooms. The doors were closed and barred, but a constable who was on duty there evidently had orders to admit us.

The thing we had come to see lay upon the table with an electric lamp burning directly over it. The effect was indescribably weird. We were a living group in a place of long-dead things. And yellow on the table beneath the white light, with partially unwrapped coils of discolored linen hanging gruesomely from it, lay a headless mummy!

I heard the spurt of Moris Klaw's scent spray behind me and a faint breath of verberna stole to my nostrils.

"Pah!" came the rumbling voice. "This air is full of deadness!"

"Good evening, Mr. Klaw," said Grimsby, appearing from somewhere out of the gloom. "I am so glad you have come." He bowed to Isis. "How do you do, Miss Klaw?"

The bright green figure moved forward into the pool of light. I think I had never seen a more singular picture than that of Isis Klaw bending over the decapitated mummy. Indeed the whole scene would have delighted Rembrandt.

"I am pleased to meet you, Mr. Klaw," said a middle-aged gentleman, stepping up to the curio dealer. "The inspector has been telling me about you."

Moris Klaw bowed and his daughter turned to him with a little nod of the head.

"It is the same period," she said, "as Mr. Pettigrew's mummy. Possibly this was a priest of the same temple. Certainly both are of the same dynasty. Grimsby rang me up from the Yard."

"There's nothing very mysterious about how the thing was done," he said. "Some madman got in here with a knife after the evening. It's always pretty dark even during the daytime. But the mystery is his object."

"His object is a mystery, yes," agreed Klaw. "I would sleep here in order to procure a mental negative of what he hoped or what he feared, this lunatic headman, only that I know he is a man possessed."

"Possessed!" I cried; and even Isis looked surprised.

"I said possessed," continued Klaw, impressively. "He is some madman with a one idea. His mad brain will have charged the other—he waved his long arms right and left—with mad thoughts. The room of Mr. Pettigrew also will be filled with these grotesque thought forms. Certainly he is insane, this butcher of mummies. In this case I shall rely not upon the odd photograph, but upon that great science the Cycle of Crime, but upon my library."

Then Moris Klaw started up all. "I have a thought!" he cried loudly. "Name of a dog! I have a thought!"

Grabbing his brown bowler, which he had laid on the table beside the headless mummy, "Come, Isis!" he cried, and grasped the girl by the arm. "I have yet another thought, most disturbing! Mr. Scaries, would you be so good as also to come?"

Wondering greatly whence we were bound and upon what errand, he hastened down the room after them, leaving Inspector Grimsby staring blankly. I think he was rather disappointed with the result of Moris

Klaw's inquiry—if inquiry this hasty visit may be termed. He was disappointed, too, at having spent so short a time in the company of the charming Isis.

The middle-aged gentleman came running to let us out.

"Good night, Inspector Grimsby!" called Moris Klaw.

"Good night! good night, Miss Klaw!"

"Good night, Mr. Some One who has not been introduced!" said Klaw. "My name is Welby," smiled the other.

"Good night, Mr. Welby," said Moris Klaw.

During the whole of the journey back to Wapping Moris Klaw regaled me with anecdotes of travels in the Yucatan Peninsula.

"In the heart of these forests, Mr. Scaries," he whispered, "are strange things than these headless mummies. Do you know that the secret of those great temples buried in the swamps and the jungles and guarded only by serpents and slimy crawling things is a door which science has yet to unlock? What people built them, and what god was worshipped in them? Suppose—the bent to my ear—I hold the key to that riddle; am I assured to be immortal? Yes? No?"

As the cab drew up at the head of the court, I saw that the shop of Moris Klaw was in darkness; but, again telling the man to wait, we walked down past the warehouse, and my eccentric companion, producing a key from one of the bulging pockets of his caped coat, inserted it into the lock of a door which looked less like a door than a section of a dilapidated hoarding.

The door swung open.

lay long in Moris Klaw's sanctum, lined with its hundreds of books, its obscure works of criminology, its records of strange things; we proceeded through another door and up a thickly carpeted stair.

I had never before penetrated thus far into the habitable portion of Moris Klaw's establishment. The book-lined office hitherto had marked the limit of my explorations. But now, as more electric lights were switched on, I saw that we stood upon a wide landing paneled in massive black oak. Armored figures stood sentinel-like against the wall, and several magnificent specimens of Chinese porcelain met my gaze. I might have thought myself in some old English baronial hall. Next we entered a big, rectangular room which I wholly despair of describing. Apparently it was used as a study, a library, a laboratory, and a warehouse for all sorts of things, from marble Buddhas to innumerable pairs of boots. Also, there was in it a French stove, and upon a Persian coffee table stood a frying pan containing a cooked sausage solidified in its own fat. There was clear evidence, moreover, in the form of a rolled-up hammock, that the place served as a bedroom.

Altogether there were four mummies in the apartment. One of these, partly unwrapped, lay among the litter of the floor. "A headless!"

"Mon Dieu!" cried Isis, clasping her hands. "It is uncanny, this!"

She was evidently excited, for her French accent suddenly asserted itself.

"Isis, does the mystery become clear to you?"

"No," she replied, looking across at her daughter—"does the mystery

become clear to you? Am I not an old fool? Mr. Scaries, there is only one other copy of this work—he laid a long white hand upon the book—"known to European collectors. Do I know where that copy is? Yes? No? I think so!"

There was triumph in his hoarse voice. Personally I was quite unable to see in what was the history of the "Book of the Lamps" bore upon the case of the headless mummies; but Moris Klaw evidently considered that it afforded a clew. He stood up.

"Isis," he said, "bring me my catalogue of the mummies of the Bubastis priests."

"That imperious beauty departed in meek obedience."

"Mr. Scaries," said Moris Klaw, "this will be for Inspector Grimsby another triumph; but without these records of a poor old fool, who shall say if the one that beheads mummies had ever been detected? I neglected to secure the odd negative because I thought I had to deal with a madman; but I was more stupid than an owl. This decapitating of mummies is no madman's work, but is done with a purpose, my friend—with a wonderful purpose."

The Menzies Museum was not yet opened to the public when Coram, the curator, Moris Klaw, Grimsby and I stood in the Egyptian room before a case containing mummies.

"Whoever broke into Sotheby's last night," Mr. Klaw, said Grimsby, "knew the ins and outs of the place; knew it backward. It's my idea that he was known to the people there."

After having cut off the head of the mummy he probably walked out openly. Then, again, it must have been somebody who knew the habits of Mr. Pettigrew's household that got at his mummy. Of course—his eyes twinkled with a satisfaction which he could not conceal—"I'm very sorry to hear that our man has proved too clever for you! Think of a burglar breaking into Mr. Klaw's house!"

Grimsby openly winked at me. He was out of his depth himself and was

not displeased to find the omniscient Moris Klaw apparently in a similar position.

"I am not resentful," continued Klaw, "and I will capture for you the mummy man."

"What!" cried Grimsby. "Are you on the track?"

"I will tell you something, my laughing friend. You will secretly watch the Egyptian room like the cat at the mousehole, and presently—I expect it will be at night—he will come here, this hunter of mummies!"

Grimsby stared incredulously. "I don't doubt your word, Mr. Klaw," he said; "but I don't see how you can possibly know that. Why should he go for the mummies here rather than for those in one of the other museums or in private collections?"

"Why do you order a bottle of ale," rasped Klaw, "in a saloon rather than a bottle of water or a bottle of vinegar? It is because what you want is in a bottle of ale. Am I a fool? There are others. I am not alone in my foolishness!"

The group broke up, Grimsby, very puzzled, going off to make arrangements to have the Egyptian room watched night and day, and Coram, Klaw and I walking along in the direction of the Greek room.

"I have no occasion to remind you, Mr. Klaw," said Coram, "that the Menzies Museum is a hard nut for any burglar to crack. We have a night watchman, you will remember, who hourly patrols every apartment. For any one to break into the Egyptian room, force one of the cases and take out a mummy would be a task extremely difficult to perform undetected."

"This mummy hunter," replied Klaw, "can perform it with ease; but because we shall all be waiting for

him he cannot perform it undetected."

We quitted the museum together and I made arrangements to watch in the Menzies Museum at night.

On several occasions during the day I found myself thinking of this most singular affair and wondering in what way the "Book of the Lamps" mentioned by Moris Klaw, could be associated with it. I was quite unable to surmise, too, how Klaw had divined that the Menzies Museum would become the scene of the next outrage.

We had arranged to dine with Coram in his apartments, which adjoined the museum buildings, and an oddly mixed party we were, comprising Coram, his daughter, Moris Klaw, Isis Klaw, Grimsby and myself.

A man had gone on duty in the Egyptian room directly the doors were closed to the public, and we had arranged secretly to watch the place from nightfall onward. The construction of the room greatly facilitated our plan, for there was a long glass skylight in the center of its roof, and by having the blinds drawn back we could look down into the room from a landing window of a higher floor—a portion of the curator's hours.

Dinner over, Isis Klaw departed. "You will not remain, Isis," said her father. "It is so unnecessary. Good night, my child."

Accordingly, the deferential and very admiring Grimsby descended with Coram to see Isis off in a taxi. I marveled to think of her returning to that tumbledown, water-logged ruin in Wapping.

"Now, Mr. Grimsby," said Moris Klaw, when we four investigators had gathered together again, "you will hide in the case with the mummies!"

"But I may find myself helpless! How do we know that any particular case is going to be opened? Besides, I don't know what to expect!"

"Blessed is he that expecteth little, my friend. It is quite possible that an attempt will be made tonight. In that event you will have to be locked in again tomorrow night!"

Utterly mystified, Coram and I stared at Moris Klaw. "Look at him, he has his finger enjoining us to silence, and silent perforce we became."

The view was a cramped one, and, standing there looking out at the clear summer night, I for one grew very weary of the business.

Coram began to fidget, and I knew intuitively that he was about to speak.

"Sah!" whispered Moris Klaw. "A beam of light shone out beneath us, across the Egyptian Room!"

I concluded that something had attracted the attention of Grimsby. I leaned forward in tense expectancy, and Coram was keenly excited.

The beam of light moved; it shone upon the door of the very case in the corner of which Grimsby was hiding, but upon the nearer end, fully upon the face of a mummy.

A small figure was dimly discernible now, the figure of the man who carried the light. "Caution!" he crossed the room. Evidently he held the key of the wall case, for in an instant he had swung the door back and was hauling the mummy on to the floor.

Then, out upon the midnight visitor leaped Grimsby. The light was extinguished and Moris Klaw, drawing back from the window, seized Coram by the arm, crying: "The key of the door! The key of the door!"

We were down and into the Egyptian Room in less than half a minute. Coram switched on all the lights, and there, with his back to the open door of the wall case, hunched and wild-eyed, was Mr. Mark Pettigrew.

Coram's face was a study—for the famous archaeologist whom we now saw manacled before us was a trustee of the Menzies Museum!

"Mr. Pettigrew!" he said hoarsely. "Mr. Pettigrew—there must be some mistake."

"There is no mistake, my good sir," rumbled Moris Klaw. "Look at him, with him a sharp knife to cut off the head of the priest!"

It was true. An open knife lay upon the floor beside the fallen mummy. Grimsby was breathing very heavily and looking in rather a startled way at his captive, who seemed unable to realize what had happened. Coram cleared his throat nervously. It was one of the strangest scenes in which I had ever participated.

"Mr. Pettigrew," he began, "it is incomprehensible to me—"

"I will make you to comprehend," interrupted Moris Klaw. "Look at him, he raised a long finger—why should Mr. Pettigrew cut off the head of his own mummy? I answer for the same reason that he cut off the head of the one at Sotheby's. I answer for the same reason that he cut off the head of the one at my house, and for the same reason that he came to cut off the head of this one. What is he looking for? He is looking for the 'Book of the Lamps'!"

He paused, gazing round upon us. Probably, expecting the prisoner, I alone among his listeners understood what he meant.

"I have related to Mr. Scaries," he continued, "some of the history of that book. It contained the ritual of the ancient Egyptian ceremonial magic. It was priceless. It gave its possessors a power above the power of kings. And when the line of Pankhaure became extinct it vanished. Where did it go? According to a very rare record of which there are only two copies in existence—one of them in my possession, and one in Mr. Pettigrew's—it was hidden in the skull of the mummy of a priest or priestess of the temple."

Pettigrew was staring at him like a man fascinated.

"Mr. Pettigrew had only recently acquired that valuable manuscript work in which the fact is recorded, and, being an enthusiast, he set to work upon the first available mummy of a priest of that temple. It was his own. The skull did not contain the priceless papyrus; but all these mummies are historic; there are only five in Europe."

Grimsby, with rather wry face, removed the handcuffs. A singular expression proclaimed itself upon Pettigrew's ghastly countenance.

"The thing I'm most sorry for," he said, "is that I have not a better way of excusing me saying it, Coram, for I've deeply indebted to you, is that I cut out off the head of this fourth mummy."

Mr. Mark Pettigrew was a singularly purposeful and rarely truant man.

"It would be useless," rumbled Moris Klaw, "to find the fifth mummy in Egypt two years ago and behold—his sweet hand picturesquely through the air—I beheaded him!"

"What!" screamed Pettigrew, and leaped upon Klaw with blazing eyes.

"Ah," rumbled Klaw, massive and unruffled, "that is the question—what? And I shall not tell you!"

From his pocket he took out the scent spray and squirted verberna into the face of Mr. Pettigrew.

Grimsby accordingly set out. He held a key to the curator's private room, which opened upon the Greek room, also the key of a wall case. Moris Klaw, especially warned him against making the slightest noise. In fact, he had us all agog with curiosity and expectation. At he and Coram and I, having opened very carefully the landing window, looked down through the skylight into the Egyptian room, Grimsby appeared electric pocket torch.

Opening the wall case nearest to the lower end of the room, he glanced up, then stepped within, reclosing the glass door. As Klaw had pointed out earlier in the evening, an ideal hiding place existed between the side of the last sarcophagus and the angle of the wall.

"I hope he has refastened the catch," said our eccentric companion, "but not with noise!"

"Why do you fear his making a noise?" asked Coram curiously.

"Outside, upon the landing," replied Moris Klaw, "is a tall piece of a barrel; it leans back against the wall. You know it?"

"Certainly!"

"Tonight you did not look behind it, in the triangular space so formed."

"There's no occasion. A man could not get there."

"He could there," said Coram, "that exploits to me, Mr. Coram, that you have no eye for capacity! But if you are wrong, what then?"

"Any one standing there would have to remain in hiding until the morning. He could not gain access to any of the rooms; all are locked, and he could not go down stairs, because of the night attendant in the door."

"No? Yes? You are two times wrong! First, some one is concealed there!"

"Mr. Klaw," began Coram excitedly. "Sah!"

"No excitement, Mr. Klaw, raised his hand upon the nerves! Second, you are wrong, because presently that hidden one will come into the Egyptian Room!"

"How?"

"He is going to get in."

"We shall see."

Utterly mystified, Coram and I stared at Moris Klaw. "Look at him, he has his finger enjoining us to silence, and silent perforce we became."

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